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SUBJECT: IRAQ'S RAILROAD

¶1. SUMMARY: According to a July 25 report by the United States Army Corp of Engineers (USACE), the Iraqi Republic Railway (IRR) is assessed as functional and currently transports grain, petroleum and refined oil products in southern Iraq, cargo from Syria, excluding Heavy Fuel Oil (HFO) and a limited passenger service from Baghdad to Hilla. Unfortunately, apart from these limited and local uses, the IRR remains severely underutilized due to significant security threats to infrastructure and employees. END SUMMARY.

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Iraqi Republic Railway  
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¶2. The Iraqi Republic Railway (IRR) system, comprising of five principal routes and 111 railway stations, is one of the most extensive in the region. It consists of approximately 2,400 kilometers of track. Nearly all of Iraq's major cities lie on or near the rail network, and a number of important mines and industrial centers are also served by the railway.

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Problems Plaguing all Main Routes  
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¶3. Sabotage and looting efforts against trains; interdiction of military, commercial and humanitarian supplies; Improvised Explosive Device (IED) attacks against rail lines and infrastructure; and murder and intimidation of railroad workers and their families thwart maximum utilization and further development of the IRR.

¶4. A key function of the northern route is movement of Heavy Fuel Oil (HFO) from the Bayji Refinery north into Syria with a final destination in Turkey. Threats against IRR personnel and their families; however, have halted rail shipments for at least three consecutive months already this year. Other northern route rail operations are functioning, moving mostly consumer goods. For example, the Mosul to Rabiya lines are transporting cargo from Syria.

¶5. Along the southern route, an important commodity moved is grain. Oil from the southern provinces is transported to the port of Umm Qasr. Petroleum products are also moved along this route from the Doura Refinery to the Mussayib Power Plant and other destinations. The southern route faces real security threats as evidenced by several IED attacks this year in February and again in July. The attack damaged the Latifiya Bridge, near Iskandariya. The bridge has since been repaired, but to substandard conditions, prohibiting trains from operating at normal speeds when traversing the bridge.

¶6. The western route faces several impediments. Due to track damage in the Ramadi and Falluja areas, service from Baghdad to Haqlaniya is non-existent. The IRR has solicited bids to engage contractors to repair the tracks, but an award has yet to happen. Additionally, transit by rail west from Baghdad requires using the Baghdad to Bayji leg and then the Bayji- Haqlaniya- Al Qaim legs. Continuity has been interrupted by blockages at Samarra and Barwana. Currently, we understand that trains are not permitted to pass over the bridge at Samarra because of threats to a dam sharing the same route over which a highway and rail line are carried.

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Overcoming Railway Problems  
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¶7. Efforts to establish sufficient security are underway by the Iraqi Army (IA) and other security forces. A microwave communications system is being constructed for the IRR that will be relatively impervious to insurgent activity. Under the current railroad signaling system, copper wires have been stripped and radio and electronic signal equipment have been stolen, often times rendering the system useless.

¶9. The USG has undertaken 97 railroad projects valued at nearly \$35 million. Ninety-six of the projects have been completed leaving 1 currently in progress. Al Muthanna province has received the largest amount of that funding, slightly more than \$10 million. The desert, western province of Al Anbar; however, has received the greatest number of projects in any given province - 25.

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Comment  
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¶10. The railway has traditionally been an integral component of the transportation infrastructure in Iraq. The IRR, if fully functional, would help to create economic stability through passenger and freight movement. As the young Government of Iraq (GOI) endeavors towards a secure and stable country, the IRR's potential hinges on the security of railroad personnel and elimination of direct attacks on railroad infrastructure.